

# NEWS RELEASE

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Department of  
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## East Face Project signed and ready for implementation

BAKER CITY, Ore. – The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management recently both signed separate final Decision Notices (DN) for the combined 47,000 acre East Face Vegetation Management Project, which will implement Alternative 2 modified of the Environmental Analysis (EA). This decision focuses on strategically located treatments aimed at meeting the goals of the National Cohesive Wildfire Strategy (CWS) to restore and maintain resilient landscapes and create fire-adapted communities. This project is part of a multi-agency partnership, which focused on treatments across all ownerships within the East Face of the Elkhorn Mountains.

In the spirit of the “all hands, all lands” CWS approach, Forest Service specialists worked closely with Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to develop a comprehensive plan for Federal, state and private non-industrial forest lands within the project area. Forest Service specialists combined the analysis of the FS and BLM fuel reduction strategies in the East Face EA. Due to the different administrative review processes for each of the agencies, separate decisions have been issued for the US Forest Service and the BLM lands. Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya signed the Forest Service decision on July 28 and BLM Field Manager Lori Wood signed the decision notice for the 1,224 acres of BLM lands on July 29.

Project activities on Federal lands include a combination of commercial harvest, small tree thinning, manual and mechanical fuels treatments and application of prescribed fire across more than 16,000 acres of the East Face project area. In addition, the project includes activities to improve water quality and aquatic habitat through removal of culvert barriers and reducing road related impacts to streams and fish habitat. Implementation of the project will result in an estimated \$9.2 million in wages earned and support nearly 264 jobs while providing an estimated 22 million board feet of wood for area mills.

This project was developed by working closely with the NRCS and the ODF under the umbrella of the East Face of the Elkhorns Joint Chiefs CWS Pilot Project to ensure that treatments across all ownerships within the East Face of the Elkhorns project area were compatible and optimized the goals of the CWS.

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“We are thrilled to now be able to add the Federal lands piece to this landscape level fuel reduction strategy” said Montoya and Wood as fuel reduction activities began on the ground on Forest Service lands within wildland urban interface (WUI) areas this week. “We received \$1.2 million this year from the Joint Chief’s initiative to jumpstart the fuel reduction activities on Federal lands and have these funds committed to service contracts, which began last week and are expected to continue into next year,” said Montoya.

The ODFW and ODF have successfully implemented their first timber sale at the ODFW Elkhorn Wildlife Area adjacent to USFS lands and are planning additional treatments for later this year. The project was developed to compliment work being done across the boundary on USFS administered land as well as improve wildlife habitat at the wildlife area. USFS, ODFW, and ODF are planning joint prescribed burning in the future across the USFS/ODFW boundary.

Since the project began in 2014, woodland owners in Baker and Union counties have treated 2,476 acres of adjacent private lands with financial incentives from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). In total, NRCS has invested \$2.4 million in financial assistance. When all the contracted work on private lands is completed, the total treatment area will span 5,509 acres of private lands.

In addition to the partnerships with BLM, NRCS, ODFW and ODF, the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative worked closely with the Forest Service on the project, including developing the Purpose and Need and leading several field trips to increase understanding about the proposed project. The group’s monthly meetings and conversations helped the agency identify opportunities to improve ecological, economic and social outcomes.

“We appreciate the thoughtful feedback provided by all of the participants in this project and the on-going open discussions with the Forest Collaborative who are exploring monitoring opportunities within the East Face area to validate project implementation and the effectiveness of the design of this project,” said Montoya.

The complete Environmental Analysis, Decision Notice, maps, data tables, and comment responses are available online at: [www.fs.usda.gov/goto/EastFace](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/EastFace) and at the La Grande Ranger District Office in La Grande, Ore.

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## About the East Face Partnership

The East Face of the Elkhorn Mountains project is funded by the Joint Chief’s Landscape Initiative – a collaboration between the chiefs of two USDA agencies, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Forest Service. The project aims to accomplish goals of the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy (CWS) by reducing the risk of loss to catastrophic wildfire through forest fuels reduction, restoring and maintaining landscapes, and improving fire response.

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The East Face project combines the skills and expertise of the NRCS, the Forest Service, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). These agencies are working together to proactively address wildfire issues in the East Face project area with an “All Hands, All Lands” approach spanning both public and private lands. The project targets fuels reduction treatments on more than 46,000 acres in the Wallowa Whitman National Forest; 1,224 acres of BLM land; 4,000 acres of ODFW land; as well as adjacent private lands.

The long term goal is to minimize potential impacts from wildfire on private residences, natural resources, and public infrastructure, while also improving overall forest health.

The East Face project will reduce the impacts of wildfire to the watersheds supplying the irrigation needs of local farmers, and create areas of reduced fuel loadings near the municipal water supplies for La Grande and Baker City. It will also protect key habitat for federally-threatened bull trout, steelhead, and Chinook salmon.

NRCS’ role in the partnership is to provide funding and manage contracts for eligible landowners to implement conservation practices on private lands; while ODF provides technical assistance to private landowners to support the development of forest management plans.

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